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GERMANY'S COLONIAL FAILURE

HER RULE IN AFRICA CONDEMNED ON GERMAN EVIDENCE

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BY

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HER RULE IN AFRICA CONDEMNED ON GERMAN EVIDENCE

I

IN the cases of Karl Peters, Prince Arenberg, G. A. Schmidt, Von Puttkamer, Von Rotberg, and Major Dominik,[1] Germany has presented

[1] Peters, the most notorious of these men, was the first to attract attention. In East Africa, the scene of his exploits, during the eighties he established a reign of terror with the result that for many years after his departure the name of "the white man" was held in universal horror and detestation. Two murders were laid to his charge: the one, that of his native servant accused of stealing cigars; the other, that of his black concubine, suspected of having had relations with one of his male servants. She was executed after a mock trial presided over by himself. He was also accused of the barbarous flogging of native girls, and of having falsified his official reports.

Prince Prosper Arenberg, a lieutenant of the Colonial Forces in Southwest Africa in 1900, was guilty of the murder of a native under revolting circumstances, and of assaults upon a number of native women. Schmidt, a Station Director of Togoland, established a harem of native women and young girls, and flogged them freely if they withstood his desires; and when the Togo Mission protested against the scandal, he laid violent hands on the missionaries on the pretext that they had brought "false accusations" against him.

The case of Von Puttkamer, Governor of the Cameroons, was concerned chiefly with the maladministration of justice, particularly in connection with the trial and infamous sentence passed on the six Akwa Chiefs in 1905–06. But he was also ac-

half a dozen scandals in colonial administration that it would be hard to find equalled in the records of any other colonizing Power, however inadequate its methods. But the greatest scandal of all has been the system under which the excesses of these loathsome criminals, and those of many others equally culpable but less notorious, were rendered possible. The Prussian system, here as elsewhere, has been based simply on the lust for power, and its guiding principle has been the untrammelled use of force exercised, as regards native populations, with a blind disregard of the elementary laws of humanity.

German policy in Africa has failed, and failed wretchedly, to achieve its end; and that the failure has brought bitterness, and an extraordinary degree of political irritability to German imperialists, is well known. It is a moot point, indeed, whether this irritability was not one of the strongest predisposing causes of the present war. A nation found out in gross maladministration is

cused of "illicit participation in colonial development companies"; in other words, of using his office as a lever for enriching himself.

Major Dominik was one of his officers. In an expedition against a recalcitrant tribe, commanded by this worthy, all the inhabitants of the village except the children were exterminated. These children, fifty-two in number, were then placed in wicker baskets made by the soldiers, and were thrown into the Nachtigal Rapids to drown. Rotberg, notorious as a "flogging" judge, was convicted of the utmost barbarity to his native servants. The list may be supplemented with two military "floggers," Captain Kannenberg and Lieutenant Brandeis, and with Governor Horn of Togoland, whose abominable cruelties were fully revealed in the Reichstag.

more than ordinarily sensitive to any rumour of enemy designs that happen to blow. This sensitiveness is aggravated by the circumstance that a great part of the finding out, and the consequent exposure, has been done by the Germans themselves.

Most people recognized, from press reports and other sources of information, that the better kind of German public opinion was thoroughly aroused on the occasion of the Peters and other revelations. But the full extent and character of the attacks by Germans on the German Colonial Office is even now not appreciated as it should be. In certain quarters there is to-day a disposition to regard the evidence of German atrocities in Africa, brought forward by "foreign" witnesses, as tainted by bias, and to consider that if Germany has erred at all in this matter, her errors have been no worse than those of certain other colonial Powers.

These opinions ignore what is the undoubted fact, that the strongest, because the most authoritative, indictment of German colonial policy is contained in the writings and speeches of German subjects. Theirs is the most damning evidence, and theirs the most convincing proof that any peace which allowed the perpetuation of the Prussian system in tropical Africa would be a disgrace to everybody concerned.

It is the object of this pamphlet to set forth, in such form that it can be readily digested, as

representative a collection of German evidence and opinion on the subject of administrative blunders and gross cruelty to natives as the limits of space allow.

The bulk of the criticisms are extracted from the reports of the Reichstag debates, in which certain Germans, principally members of the Centre and Social Democratic parties, have voiced their convictions with a courage that merits all praise. Such criticism, however, has by no means been confined to the Reichstag, or to the opponents of the Government. Even Herr Dernburg, lately Colonial Secretary, and since the War notorious in another sphere, spoke with some disgust of what he had seen for himself in East Africa. "On the coast," he said, "it makes a very unfavourable impression on one to see so many white men go about with negro whips. I even found one on the table of the principal Pay Office in Dar-es-Salaam; it is still the usual thing, and any one who has been there will confirm what I say." [1]

In further reference to East Africa, Dernburg frankly admitted the serious charge of permitting forced labour brought against the Colonial Office, by stating that "labourers were obtained under circumstances which could not be distinguished from slave hunts. The State is aways asked to carry a whip in its hand." When in 1905 the Akwa chiefs of the Cameroons complained to the Reichstag — a pathetically futile procedure — of

[1] Reichstag, 18th February, 1908.

the harsh terms of imprisonment to which they and other natives had been subjected, the Colonial Secretary stated [1] that "the sentencing of the natives cannot be approved of"; and consented, under pressure, to an enquiry into the proceedings of Governor von Puttkamer.

Dr. Solf, Dernburg's successor, called attention to the loss of life in the Cameroons; and addressing the South Cameroons Chamber of Commerce with reference to the effects of forced labour on the state of the caravan highways, said: —

> It is a sad state of things to see how the villages are bereft of men, and how women and children carry heavy burdens; how the whole life of the people appears on the roads. What I saw on the highroads at Jaunde and Ebolowa has grieved me most deeply. Family life is being destroyed; parents, husbands and wives are being separated. No more children are born, as the women are separated from their husbands for the greater part of the year. These are wrong conditions, and difficulties which must cease.

It was Gustave Frenssen, the German author of the romance entitled "Peter Moors Fahrt nach Südwest," who gave the German public the most graphic account of German colonial warfare that has ever been published. The terrible drama of the Herero Rebellion, and its suppression by the "great" General von Trotha, is visualized with

[1] In a letter accompanying the Memorandum on this case which was laid before the Reichstag in 1907.

unexampled vividness. Its final act was the hounding of some fourteen thousand unarmed natives to destruction by starvation in the desert — this according to the testimony of Pastor Irle, a German missionary in Southwest Africa. "Involuntarily one shudders when one hears the figures" (of the people done to death), wrote Pastor Schowalter, another German.

German missionaries, at any rate while they were at their posts, were less outspoken about administrative abuses than any one not accustomed to the Prussian way in Africa might expect. Officials had their own method of dealing with missionaries who protested against their misdeeds; and the Colonial Office could not, or dared not, interfere. It is even on record, that following the revelations made by certain Togoland missionaries in the Schmidt case, Herr Dernburg threatened the Chapter of Cologne Cathedral that he would remove these men from Togoland if they continued to bring charges against the local officials.

Major-General Baron H. von Puttkamer (not to be confused with the scoundrelly Governor of the Cameroons) stated in 1907 that "the entire colonial policy is based upon the principle of Europeans depriving the inferior natives in foreign lands by main force of their land, and maintaining their position there by force." An official report by Captain Schennemann on the origin of the risings in the Cameroons in 1904–05 admits that

"it is (equally) indubitable that gross indiscretions on the part of the white traders in the treatment of these militant cannibal tribes were the occasion of the catastrophe."

Speaking to a British audience on January 13, 1914, at the Royal Colonial Institute, Professor Moritz Bonn, Director of the German Colonial School in connection with Munich University, frankly confessed the general failure of German policy in tropical Africa.

> We started last, not least, with a wrong conception of colonial possibilities. We wanted to concentrate on Africa the emigrants we were losing at the beginning of our colored enterprise. We wanted to build upon African soil a new Germany, and create daughter states as you have done in Australia and Canada. We carried this idea to its bitter end. We tried it in Southwest Africa and produced a huge native rising, causing the loss of much treasure and many lives. We tried to assume to ourselves the functions of Providence, and we tried to exterminate a native race whom our lack of wisdom had goaded into rebellion. We succeeded in breaking up the native tribes, but we have not yet succeeded in creating a new Germany. . . . Our own action has shown the futility of our own ideals.

"The question of German colonial policy is a question of native policy." This was the conclusion of Professor Bonn's dispassionate survey. A compatriot of his viewed the matter less dispassionately.

Herr J. Scholze, in a lecture delivered at Carls-

ruhe in October, 1904, which was subsequently published as a pamphlet entitled, "The Truth about the Mission to the Heathen and its Opponents," remarked: —

> There are men who are angry at the treatment of the natives, but there is hardly ever one who has the courage to act against the official order of not telling friends of anything that occurs in the colonies or making it public. . . . If I were to speak at length of the treatment of individual natives by certain white men, I should have to fill another evening's lecture with it. A missionary could write a thick book about it.

And referring to the excuses that have been offered by apologists of the German colonial régime for atrocities committed by officials, he scores a telling point: —

> If any one is supposed to go too far in gentleness and feelings of fairness he is not forgiven; but for the most brutal actions of a Prince Arenberg[1] and others there is the final excuse of the nervous excitement caused by the climate and tropical frenzy. It is strange that no missionary, so far as I have heard, has ever suffered from tropical frenzy, although exposed to the same climatic effects and the same annoyances from the natives. Tropical frenzy is nothing else but drunken madness and an outbreak of unrestrained passion, as confirmed by Dr. Platen, the tropical doctor just deceased.

In further confirmation of the last statement one may note that Deputy Colshorn, speaking in the

[1] See page 3 of the pamphlet.

Reichstag on May 1, 1912, declared that "Science has decided in course of time that what is euphemistically called 'tropical frenzy' is nothing else but a form of alcoholism — delirium tremens."

Another German opinion on the native question is that of Herr J. K. Vietor, given in the *Koloniale Zeitung* for 1905. Herr Vietor has been a conscientious first-hand investigator of conditions in German Africa, especially in the Cameroons. He writes: —

> Have we left the negro hitherto too much liberty? Does not our administration hold, almost everywhere, the point of view that only compulsion and force can make the black man a useful member of society? Do not complaints after complaints come from our colonies of merciless floggings; of the brutality of the black soldiers; of the heavy weight of the chains in which even the strongest must die after a year of them? And what splendid results we have gained from our colonial policy! South, West, and East Africa are in revolt. In the Cameroons there is trouble, and hundreds of millions [of marks] are necessary to restore peace and quiet to the land. . . . Why have the French had such enormous success, as I saw last year with my own eyes. Why do we have non-success on non-success? The answer is simple — *because we do not know how to treat the negro.*

These examples of testimony, oral and written, by Germans with a European reputation might be multiplied indefinitely. Professor von Luschan, a leading anthropologist, declared that "all European officials in the protected territories will

sooner or later come to grief if they treat the natives badly; that is, roughly, disparagingly, cruelly, and unjustly. . . . I am entirely convinced that our late war in Southwest Africa might have been avoided, and that it was simply the result of the disparagement that rules in the leading circles regarding the teachings of ethnology." Major Dr. von Wissmann wrote in the *Koloniale Zeitung* of January 16, 1902: "We keep too few officials experienced in colonial matters, and think too often in Germany that we can replace experience by studying colonial literature." Dr. John Kunst, in an article written in 1913, while defending the theory of German administration admitted that "a considerable number of scandals has shown that many officers have followed their own principles, and it may be supposed [*sic*] that on outposts there are abuses occurring among both officers and colonists."

Here, indeed, are the views, not merely of a class or a party, but of some of the best intellectual forces in Germany — views expressed on nearly every phase of the colonial trouble with its many different aspects, political, social, moral, economic, scientific. It is necessary to point this out, as the pungent criticisms of the Government by the German Socialists have been commented on by superficial observers as utterances inspired by the desire to make party capital. On the contrary, they represent the better-informed — if, alas, the far less effective — voice of Germany.

II

In the Reichstag debates one finds the fullest expression of that part of German public opinion which revolted against Germany's barbarous and inept treatment of her African colonies. In 1903 there was a serious rebellion in East Africa; how serious it may be estimated from the admission drawn from Herr Dernburg in 1908 that 75,000 natives had perished as a consequence. This was followed by an outbreak in the Cameroons and by the revolt of the Herero tribe in Southwest Africa (1904–05). Between 30,000 and 40,000 of the natives lost their lives in this rebellion, and between it and the year 1911 the population of the country was estimated by the Governor, Colonel Leutwein, to have decreased from 300,000 to 140,000 as the outcome of the German policy of repression and terrorism.

On March 13, 1906, the late Herr Bebel, leader of the Social Democratic Party, raised the whole question of the ethics of German colonial administration in the Reichstag: —

> Gentlemen, we have never deluded ourselves concerning the so-called Christian character of our colonial policy, for if that character had really existed then all the complaints of un-Christian actions which have been brought forward for many years would not have happened. . . . The whole colonial policy is only conceived from the point of material profit. And the remark holds true, which Prince Bismarck uttered in his

day, that colonial politics are only carried on to breed millionaires.

In a vigorous denunciation of the colonial authorities' "hushing-up" policy, he said: —

What we have heard up to date from our Colonies often equals the acts of Oriental despots. Here, too, are acts of cruelty; acts of brutality of which one cannot conceive. How can people proud of their civilization do such things? . . . I am absolutely convinced that we shall hear much worse things from our colonies than we have yet heard if it were not seen to strictly in the colonies that no European, and especially no German who has settled there, may tell in public anything of the evil state of things that comes to light there. A man who was living in the Cameroons told me that every commercial employee who made public the smallest item about the loathsome conditions was simply lost; that every means was used to cause his employer to dismiss from his service the one who had been indiscreet, and that it is very difficult to move the officials to bring abuses to light from very explicable reasons of *camaraderie.*

Herr Bebel had a long experience of African scandals. As early as 1896 he had revealed in the Reichstag the terrible atrocities connected with the notorious Karl Peters — now reinstated as one of the most honoured patriots in Germany! Speaking on December 1, 1906, he summed up the character of the administration in a few passionate sentences: —

If you come to strange nations as friends, as benefactors, as educators of mankind, to help them to gather in the treasures of their land, which are different from ours and so are of use to the natives and to all civilized peoples, then we are with you; but that is not the case with your colonial policy. You do not come as deliverers and educators, but as conquerors, as oppressors, as exploiters. You come as conquerors to rob the natives with brute power of their properties. You make helots of them, force them into strange service, into villanage for strange purposes. That is your colonial policy.

Meanwhile, on March 24, the debate had turned upon German administration of justice in her colonies. Deputy Storz took up the story, and drew — from the German point of view — a most damaging parallel: —

Nothing shows the difference in position as to the rights of natives in German and English colonies so much as the administration of justice: the English solemn, earnest, entirely hedged in by guarantees of justice; at the German Courts everything without form, and, even if the intention to deal out justice be there, which I will never deny, everything surrounded with the appearance of force and arbitrariness. The English District Commissioner can act only in things of small moment. Appeals can be made to the English Judge, who travels about the country and judges cases in the first instance. With us, on the contrary, the officer and agriculturist, without judicial training, appointed as Director of the Station, can decide on the life or death of the natives. True, the sentence needs confirmation

of the Governor, but he goes by the report of the official who acted as Judge. . . . An urgent demand has been rightly made to end this system of absolute arbitrariness and absolute absence of equity in our colonies.

Deputy Dr. Schaedler, speaking on November 28, made a stirring appeal for drastic reforms: —

The story of our colonies contains a whole row of happenings of not too pleasant a kind, embezzlements, falsifyings, sensual cruelties, assaults on women, horrible ill-treatment, things that do not serve to make a laurel wreath. It will be necessary to cleanse and winnow here, to handle things sharply in the Colonial Department, and abroad also among the officials of our colonies. The colonies must be no dumping ground for second-rate people. Men who have lived or are on the shelf, and officials and officers who stink materially and morally are no good to us in the colonies, not even if they were Royal Princes, but would only be suited to drag the German, and I would add the Christian, name in the dust.

On December 4 Deputy Dr. Müller paid tribute to British policy in the adjoining colonies. Addressing himself to the Colonial Secretary, he said: —

What we have regretted again here in the last few days is the way in which you cover yourself with all that former Colonial Directors have done. That shows only, again and again, that you form blindly a protective guard for the Government. . . . It was one of the most sensible thoughts of the Colonial Director when

he said that we should learn from other countries. Let us learn above all in this direction from England. The deep respect for all religious opinions, the unbound liberty for every religious conviction, which is shown by the English is one of the chief reasons for the admirable development of the English colonies.

Contrast this opinion with that expressed by a writer in the official organ of the German colonial party in the earlier years of colonial enterprise: "Germany had nothing to learn from England or any other colonizing nation, having a method of handling social problems peculiar to the German spirit." That "peculiarity" is now sufficiently manifest.

It is satisfactory to note that Deputy Müller returned to the charge some years later, and in the Reichstag on May 1, 1912, clearly exposed the stage of muddle into which the administration of the German penal code had fallen: —

Our civil and criminal administration of justice in the colonies is simply untenable. I point out that in mixed trials, therefore, in the cases of natives and non-natives, there exists a free right of the Kaiser to decide. Regarding native justice and administration, there is an incredible insecurity respecting the powers of the administrative authorities. I know, till the year 1910, there was only one regular District Judge appointed in East Africa, while the rest were very young assessors. I do not know whether things have been so reformed that there are really properly appointed judges in East Africa. In the other colonies there are in parts no prop-

erly permanent judges. Some years ago, we had a comprehensive memorandum concerning this important matter in the documents connected with the examination of the Akwa Chiefs of the Cameroons. Since then the conditions . . . have become, if possible, more complicated. The one judge uses the German penal code without further ado. . . . He uses the penal code without turning to the right or left for the primitive conditions of our colonies. There is no doubt that that is serious. The next does not use the penal code at all. Yet the next uses an analogy of it. . . . In short, our criminal proceedings are in a condition which must be stopped as soon as possible, which leaves the natives entirely without rights.

On the previous day Deputy Noske had given some informing statistics of the administration of this penal code: —

The number of natives who are condemned sometimes to very trying imprisonment is most striking. Think that in East Africa alone, in one year, 10,144 longer or shorter sentences of imprisonment were given. . . . Flogging, as an additional punishment, was ordered [in the Cameroons] oftener than in the year 1909. The increase in floggings in Southwest Africa rose correspondingly. It rose from 928 in 1909 to 1262 in 1910. In Southwest Africa we have from 70,000 to 80,000 natives subject to the German Administration. With this small number of persons no less than 2371 cases of more or less severe punishments were given. . . . In 1787 cases the condemnations were in the Cameroons.

In the same speech Noske called attention to yet another phase of the native question — that of the

wages paid to the wretched men recruited for particular industries virtually by force: —

> Herr von Liebert has said that in East Africa, in parts, very good wages were given. If I understood him rightly, he spoke of wages as high as 15 to 17 rupees a month. It is a mystery to me where high wages are paid. . . . Inclusive of the payment of more highly salaried overseers and mechanics, the East Africa Company paid in the Kikwelu plantation 44 pfennig wages: on Milwero plantation 43 pfennig wages, and in Tanga 52 pfennig wages. The amount is given in rupees. I did the sum. Even allowing that a native does only the third of the work of a white man, these wages must be characterized as pitiable. In face of such sweating wages there can be no question of the financially productive power of the natives, and the buying power of the population must also suffer from it, and the capitation tax which has been raised must be designated as oppressive.

Enough has been quoted to show that the whole keynote of German colonial policy, as revealed in the Reichstag and elsewhere, has been the most unscrupulous exploitation of the native races. And the character of the revelations themselves? Are they not significant of a hopeless sense of failure, of an angry shame? Is not this blazoning of abuses and shortcomings significant of the conviction held by the better-minded Germans that the whole of their Government's system has broken down?

We are told that since the era of Dernburg and

Solf reforms have been introduced. This is true up to a certain point; but such reforms have touched not the root of the evil, but only its outward fringe, and the spirit of the administration remains the same. The worst offenders have been removed from their posts, and some of them have been, under pressure of public opinion, punished. But the world cannot forget that Peters has recently been reinvested with his title and pension; that the infamous Governor Horn received the greater part of his pension, and Dominik his full pension; and that other guilty ruffians got off without punishment at all.

As recently as March 7, 1914, Herr Dittmann, speaking in the Reichstag, summed up the position as follows: —

> The German Empire has now exercised a colonial policy for thirty years. . . . What has meanwhile become public about our colonies gives us very little occasion for jubilee celebrations. . . . Perhaps somebody will retort to me that much has become better in the administration of our colonies since the Dernburg era. We Social Democrats are certainly the last to wish to deny this. Indeed, we consider it as a merit in us to have aided this betterment by our ceaseless criticism. But we know also that all reforms, which we can help to carry through in our colonies, cannot do away with the fundamental evil of the present-day colonial policy: its tendency to oppression and exploitation by capitalists. . . . That which has become known during the last weeks puts a definite end to the naïve representations that since the Dernburg era a good time had

dawned for the natives through the reforms that had been introduced. It shows, on the contrary, Gentlemen, that an awful decimation of the native population runs parallel with the coming to the fore of the so-called capitalistic Kultur, and without the mass hewing down *à la* Herero war, and without horrors *à la* Peters, Leist, and Arenberg, and whatever the nigger-grinders and disgracers of *Kultur* are called otherwise, the native population of our colonies is dying out rapidly under the capitalists' rule.

One other and more pithy utterance from the same quarter: "Gentlemen, I think that for healthy minds our present-day colonial policy must seem as if it comes from a mad-house."

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